

# VERMONT TELEGRAPH.

ORSON S. MURRAY, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER.

"I AM SET FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL."

EPHRAIM MAXHAM, PRINTER.

VOLUME VIII.

BRANDON, THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 1836.

NUMBER 17.

## TERMS OF THE TELEGRAPH.

"The Vermont Telegraph" is published weekly at \$2 a year, payable within four months, or \$2.50 at the end of the year.

To subscribers out of the State, residing more than 100 miles from this office, the paper will be sent for \$1.75.

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## For the Telegraph.

The following essay was written in pursuance of a resolution of the Ministerial Conference in 1835, and was subsequently approved by that body, and ordered to be forwarded for publication in the Telegraph.

## PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

### PART I.

The following essay is designed to show that every truly regenerate person will persevere unto eternal glory.

By perseverance of the saints is not meant that they do not sometimes backslide from God, or that, under the influence of sudden or strong temptation, they do not become guilty of great wickedness, as in the cases of Peter and David; but that they do not fall back into a graceless, unregenerate state, such as they were in before their conversion—that they do not sin from enmity to God, as carnal men do, and as they themselves once did;—that notwithstanding their too frequent departures from the path of duty, they will, on the whole, progress in holiness of heart and life, so as at last to inherit the kingdom of God.

On what considerations does the final perseverance of the saints rest?

1. Not on any undying principle of holiness supposed to be implanted in regeneration. The renewed man, though wholly forgiven, is but partially sanctified. And it cannot be supposed that love to God in a regenerate soul should necessarily possess in itself any more of the characteristics of immortality, than it did in our first parents, where it existed in a more perfect state, unmixed with sin.

2. Nor is it to be ascribed to any change supposed to be made in the requirements of the moral law. The precepts of a law founded in the fitness of things, can never be annulled nor lessened down, to accommodate it to the infirmities of men. The regenerate person is not absolved from his obligation to keep all the requirements of the divine law; and if he fail he falls under its penalty, and can be saved from it only through the renewed exercise of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In which case Christ pleads afresh his blood for the pardon of his sin, and it is accepted instead of the punishment due to the offender. 1 John, i: 9 and ii: 1.

3. His perseverance is not the result of any necessity of his renewed nature.—He does not cease to be a moral agent.—God does not shut him up in a cage or put a chain about his neck, and drag him irresistibly on in the way in which he should go; nor will he take him to heaven, except in the way of obedience. Progressive holiness of heart and life are implied in perseverance, and indispensable to a good hope of heaven. The believer progresses not a single step in the divine life, except through the medium of his own free and voluntary exertions. Yet,

4. His perseverance rests neither upon his own efforts, independent of the divine agency, nor upon the divine agency, independent of his own efforts. Both are mutual; and he is "kept by the power of God through faith"—"faith which worketh by love," purifieth the heart, and overcometh the world.

The perseverance of the saints rests on the power of God, exerted in his superintending providence, and also through the agency and exertions of the saints themselves.

What is the nature of this power, and how is it exerted in conjunction with the agency of the creature? It is not physical but moral, wholly moral, so far as it is thus exerted. It is exerted by placing motives before the believer calculated to influence him to do what is implied in perseverance, to hold on his way in serving God. These consist in the instructions necessary to show him his duty, and the difficulties which lie in the way of his doing it; warnings, exhortations and promises.

1. Instructions are indispensable, for no man can do what otherwise would be duty, unless he has the means of knowing what it is; nor will he be likely to do it successfully while he is ignorant of the difficulties and dangers of the way. Danger!—it may be inquired, what are they? If the doctrine of perseverance be true, is there any danger of falling and coming short of heaven? Yes, there is danger, so far as obedience and progressive holiness depend on the agency of the believer; and

it lies in the fact that his efforts are taken into the account, and are indispensable to his salvation. Nor can it be shown that God has purposed the perseverance and salvation of any believer independently of his own agency and efforts. Hence no purpose of God which does not embrace the voluntary obedience of the believer, can be pleaded as an insurmountable barrier to his return to sin. He can do it if he will. The word *can* is here used in its literal sense, implying that if he desire and strive to apostatize he has all the faculties which are necessary, and there is no natural impossibility in the way of his doing it. If he is a moral agent, he has all the natural faculties necessary to obedience and is able to obey, and if so, he is able also to disobey, otherwise he is not a moral agent. If then, there is a possibility and is danger that the believer in Jesus may fall through ignorance or unfaithfulness, in order to secure his persevering obedience unto salvation; we see the necessity of that moral power, which God exerts on him through the instrumentality of his law addressed to his understanding as a rule to regulate his life, and to guide the decisions of his conscience, and through those motives contained in the warnings, exhortations and promises found in the Bible. For without these it can hardly be supposed that a single regenerate person would hold on his way. And in the end we shall probably see the exact adaptation of these motives to produce the desired effect.

2. Warnings form a most important item in the grand system of means designed to secure the perseverance of believers and they imply that there is a possibility of falling from grace; i. e. if any choose to neglect duty and resolve to go on in sin, there is no natural difficulty or insurmountable barrier to prevent their doing it. Some of these show also that if any should once fall their damnation is inevitable. Heb. vi. 4, 6. "For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again to repentance: seeing that they *exactly* to themselves the son of God afresh; and put him to an open shame." Heb. x: 26, 31. "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law, did without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, where with he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the spirit of grace? For ye know him that hath said, vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense saith the Lord. And again the Lord shall judge his people." Reference is here had to the Jewish law [Num. 15: 30, 31] under which no atonement could be made for presumptuous sins. John xv: 6.—"If any man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." For other warnings of a similar nature, see [2 Pet. 2: 20, 21.] Ezek. xviii: 24. Heb. iv: 7. Here are, most solemn warnings addressed to believers, manifestly implying that they *can* fall, and are in *danger* of doing it. They are, however, all supposed cases, and do not show that any ever have fallen away, or that any ever will do it. But they plainly show that if any do once fall, there is in their case no hope of a second repentance and pardon.

Now if there is any real danger of our coming short and losing our souls, and if our own personal efforts are indispensable to our perseverance, we see the propriety of those exhortations which in the Bible, are addressed to believers. 1 Cor. x: 12. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. ix: 24. "So run that ye may obtain." 2 Pet. i: 10, 11. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." See also Mark xiv: 38. Heb. iv: 1, and 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 25.

These and similar exhortations are among the means which God has instituted to secure the perseverance of the saints. And their adaptation to guard them against presumption, inattention and slothfulness, and to stir them up to that cautious and unceasing exertion implied in perseverance, must be manifest to all.

Neither do these exhortations prove that any ever have fallen, or ever will;—but they point out the course of conduct necessary to prevent it. Now as the warnings and exhortations of the Bible do not, on the one hand, prove the doctrine of falling from grace, so on the other they do not establish the certain perseverance of the saints. Other evidences must be adduced to decide the question. If it can be shown from scripture history that any truly regenerated soul ever has fallen from grace and been lost, the doctrine of falling from grace is true. But if no such in-

stance can be adduced with certainty, (and none such have been found,) and if on the other hand, the most definite declarations are made that all who are born of the Spirit will hold on their way and be saved at last; then the doctrine of final perseverance of the saints is established.

As other scriptures than those adduced are necessary to prove the perseverance of the saints, so other motives than those contained in warnings and exhortations are indispensable to secure it. These addressed to their consciences and to their fears although necessary, cannot be relied upon, without other motives adapted to bring into exercise the two great springs of action in the human mind—*faith* and *hope*. Were it not for confidence in the great Captain of our salvation, and hope of a happy triumph at last, no other consideration would avail to influence the christian to hold his way.

After all the warnings and exhortations, the christian may say there are so many difficulties to encounter and so many dangers in the way, and I am so weak and have such a propensity to go astray that I shall certainly fail and I may as well give it up now. To such God says: Isa. xli: 10. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." 2 Cor. xii: 9. "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Ps. xlviii: 8, and xxix, 11.—Is. xl: 29, 31.

Such assurances may convince the christian that, looking to God for help, he will be able to hold out to the end of life. But even this is not enough. If he perseveres to the end, will he be saved? This question must be settled in the affirmative, and a sufficient foundation laid for his faith and hope to rest upon in order to move the springs of action and draw from him those efforts which are indispensable to perseverance. Christ says, Matt. xxiv, 13, "He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved." Rev. ii: 7, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." [10] "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."

Paul felt the influence of these. 2 Tim. i: 12. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 1 Thess. v: 23, 24. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

The following declarations are among those on which the doctrine of final perseverance of the saints is founded. John vi: 24. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Here is a plain unequivocal declaration that such as hear the son and believe on him that sent him, in other words that are regenerated, "shall not come into condemnation;" and a thousand warnings and exhortations will not in the least weaken, much less, do away the truth of this testimony. The truth then, of the sentiment, that every truly regenerate person will persevere unto eternal life does not rest on inferential testimony, but on the veracity of Christ.

Jesus discussed this subject at large in the sixth chapter of John where he represents it as the will of the Father that of all he had given him he should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day, and he repeats the assurance that he will do it. John vi: 35, 37—40. "I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Nothing can be more definite and unequivocal than these positive declarations of Jesus that he will raise up at the last day "every one which seeth the son and believeth on him." And the assurance is not a conditional one. There is no *if*, nor any contingency implied in it. If the Savior had designed to settle and confirm the doctrine beyond all possible controversy he could not have found language more appropriate. Yet he continued and dwelt upon the subject, repeating again and again the sentiment already advanced, verse, 44, 45, 47—51. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God.—Every man therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh to me. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat

manna in the wilderness, and are dead.—This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give in my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world, \* 54—58. Whosoever eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.—For my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever." In this connection, the phrases, *cometh to me—believeth on me—and eateth my flesh*, manifestly mean the same thing, namely, *conversion* from sin to God—i. e. repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.—Hence it is manifest, from the above declarations that when *Christ ceases to live* by the living Father who sent him, then, and not till then, will a soul that is born of the spirit fall from grace and fail of eternal life.

This is confirmed by the definite promise of Christ made directly to his followers, John xiv: 19. "Because I live ye shall live also." May we not then say to the saints with an inspired apostle, Phil. i: 6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." See also Rev. i: 18. Jer. xxxii: 40. Rom. viii: 28—30. These declarations and promises not only furnish proof of the doctrine of the saints' perseverance, but are among the most important means which God uses to secure it. Here then, are instructions concerning the path to be pursued—warnings suited to the character of the rash and presumptuous traveller—exhortations for the careless and dilatory—and promises to encourage the timid and desponding.

Such are the means and motives used by the Captain of our salvation to secure the perseverance of his saints in the path of obedience to final glory.

## FINNEY'S LECTURES.

### LECTURE VI.

Concluded from our last.

### SPIRIT OF PRAYER.

TEXT.—Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God.—ROMANS viii: 26, 27.

1. Why do you suppose it is, that so little stress is laid on the influences of the Spirit in prayer, when so much is said about his influences in conversion?—Many people are amazingly afraid the Spirit's influences will be left out. They lay great stress on the Spirit's influences in converting sinners. But how little is said, how little is printed, about his influence in prayer? How little complain that people do not make enough of the Spirit's influences in leading Christians to pray according to the will of God!—Let it never be forgotten, that no Christian ever prays aright, unless led by the Spirit. He has natural power to pray, and so far as the will of God is revealed, is able to do it; but he never does, unless the Spirit of God influences him. Just as sinners are able to repent, but never do, unless influenced by the Spirit.

1. This subject lays open the foundation of the difficulty felt by many persons on the subject of the Prayer of Faith.—They object to the idea that faith in prayer is a belief that we shall receive the very things for which we ask; and insist that there can be no foundation or evidence upon which to rest such a belief. In a sermon published a few years since, upon this subject, the writer brings forward this difficulty, and presents it in its full strength. I have, says he, no evidence that the thing prayed for will be granted, until I have prayed in faith; because, praying in faith is the condition upon which it is promised. And of course I cannot claim the promise, until I have fulfilled the condition. Now, if the condition is, that I am to believe I shall receive the very blessings for which I ask, it is evident that the promise is given upon the performance of an impossible condition, and is of course a mere nullity. The promise would amount to just this: You shall have whatsoever you ask, upon the condition that you first believe that you shall receive it. Now, I must fulfil the condition before I can claim the promise. But I can have no evidence that I shall receive it, until I have believed that I shall receive it. This reduces me to the necessity of believing that I shall receive it before I have any evidence that I shall receive it—which is impossible.

The whole force of this objection arises out of the fact, that the Spirit's influences are entirely overlooked, which he exerts in leading an individual to the exercise of faith. It has been supposed that the passage in Mark xi: 22 and 24, with other kindred promises on the subject of the

Prayer of Faith, relate exclusively to miracles. But suppose this were true. I would ask, What were the apostles to believe, when they prayed for a miracle?—Were they to believe that the precise miracle would be performed for which they prayed? It is evident that they were.—In the verses just alluded to, Christ says, "For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Bethou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but SHALL BELIEVE THAT THESE THINGS WHICH HE SAITH SHALL COME TO PASS, he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, BELIEVE THAT YE RECEIVE THEM, and ye shall have them." Here it is evident, that the thing to be believed, and which they were not to doubt in their hearts, was, that they should have the very blessings for which they prayed. Now the objection above stated, lies in all its force against this kind of faith, when praying for the performance of a miracle. If it be impossible to believe this in praying for any other blessing, it was equally so in praying for a miracle. I might ask, Could an apostle believe that the miracle would be wrought, before he had fulfilled the condition? inasmuch as the condition was, that he should believe that he should receive that for which he prayed. Either the promise is a nullity and a deception, or there is a possibility of performing the condition.

Now, as I have said, the whole difficulty lies in the fact that the Spirit's influences are entirely overlooked, and that faith which is of the operation of God, is left out of the question. If the objection is good against praying for any object, it is as good against praying in faith for the performance of a miracle. The fact is, that the Spirit of God could give evidence, on which to believe that any particular miracle would be granted; could lead the mind to a firm reliance upon God, and trust that the blessing sought would be obtained. And so at the present day he can give the same assurance, in praying for any blessing that we need. Neither in the one case or the other, are the influences of the Spirit miraculous. Praying is the same thing, whether you pray for the conversion of a soul, or for a miracle.—Faith is the same thing in the one case as in the other; it only terminates on a different object, in the one case on the conversion of a soul, and in the other on the performance of a miracle. Nor is faith exercised in the one more than in the other, without reference to a promise; and a general promise may with the same propriety be applied to the conversion of a soul as to the performance of a miracle. And it is equally true in the one case as the other, that no man ever prays in faith without being influenced by the Spirit of God.—And if the Spirit could lead the mind of an apostle to exercise faith in regard to a miracle, he can lead the mind of another Christian to exercise faith in regard to receiving any other blessing, by a reference to the same general promise.

Should any one ask, "When are we under an obligation to believe that we shall receive the blessing for which we ask?" I answer:

(1.) When there is a particular promise, specifying the particular blessing; as where we pray for the Holy Spirit. This blessing is particularly named in the promise, and here we have evidence, and are bound to believe, whether we have any Divine influence or not; just as sinners are bound to repent whether the Spirit strives with them or not. Their obligation rests, not upon the Spirit's influences, but upon the powers of moral agency which they possess; upon their ability to do their duty.—And while it is true that not one of them ever will repent without the influences of the Spirit, still they have power to do so, and are under obligation to do so, whether the Spirit strives with them or not. So with the Christian. He is bound to believe where he has evidence. And although he never does believe, even where he has an express promise, without the Spirit of God, yet his obligation to do so rests upon his ability, and not upon the Divine influence.

(2.) Where God makes a revelation by his providence, we are bound to believe in proportion to the clearness of the providential indication.

(3.) So where there is a prophecy, we are bound also to believe. But in neither of these cases do we, in fact, believe, without the Spirit of God.

But where there is neither promise, providence, nor prophecy, on which to repose our faith, we are under no obligation to believe unless, as I have shown in this discourse, the Spirit gives us evidence, by creating desires, and by leading us to pray for a particular object. In the case of those promises of a general nature, where we are honestly at a loss to know in what particular cases to apply them, it may be considered rather as our privilege than as our duty, in many instances, to apply them to particular cases; but whenever the Spirit of God leads us to apply them to a particular object, then it becomes our duty so to apply them. In this case, God explains his own promise, and shows how he designed it should be applied. And then our obligation to make this application, and to believe in reference to this particular object, remains in full force.

3. Some have supposed that Paul prayed in faith for the removal of the thorn in the flesh, and that it was not granted.—But they cannot prove that Paul *prayed in faith*. The presumption is all on the other side, as I have shown in a former lecture. He had neither promise, nor prophecy, nor providence, nor the Spirit of God, to lead him to believe. The whole objection goes on the ground that the apostle might pray in faith without being led by the Spirit. This is truly a short-hand method of disposing of the Spirit's influences in prayer. Certainly, to assume that he prayed in faith, is to assume either that he prayed in faith without being led by the Spirit, or that the Spirit of God led him to pray for that which was not according to the will of God.

I have dwelt the more on this subject, because I want to have it made so plain, that you will all be careful not to grieve the Spirit. I want you to have high ideas of the Holy Ghost, and to feel that nothing good will be done without his influences.—No praying or preaching will be of any avail without him. If Jesus Christ were to come down here and preach to sinners, not one would be converted without the Spirit. Be careful then not to grieve him away, by slighting or neglecting his heavenly influences when he invites you to pray.

4. In praying for an object, it is necessary to persevere till you obtain it. O, with what eagerness Christians sometimes pursue a sinner in their prayers, when the Spirit of God has fixed their desires on him! No miser pursues his gold with so fixed a determination.

5. The fear of being led by impulses has done great injury, by not being duly considered. A person's mind may be led by an *ignis fatuus*. But we do wrong, if we let the fear of impulses lead us to resist the good impulses of the Holy Ghost.—No wonder Christians don't have the spirit of prayer, if they are unwilling to take the trouble to distinguish, and so reject or resist all impulses, and all leadings of invisible agents. A great deal has been said about fanaticism, that is very unguarded, and that causes many minds to reject the leadings of the Spirit of God. "As many as are the sons of God, are led by the Spirit of God." And it is our duty to "try the spirits, whether they be of God." We should insist on a close scrutiny, and an accurate discrimination. There must be such a thing as being led by the Spirit. And when we are convinced it is of God, we should be sure to follow—follow on, with full confidence that he will not lead us wrong.

6. We see from this subject the absurdity of using forms of prayer. The very idea of using a form, rejects, of course, the leadings of the Spirit. Nothing is more calculated to destroy the spirit of prayer, and entirely to darken and confuse the mind, as to what constitutes prayer, than to use forms. Forms of prayer are not only absurd in themselves, but they are the very device of the devil to destroy the spirit and break the power of prayer. It is of no use to say the form is a good one. Prayer does not consist in words. And it matters not what the words are, if the heart is not led by the Spirit of God. If the desire is not enkindled, the thoughts directed, and the whole current of feeling produced, and led by the Spirit of God, it is not prayer. And set forms are, of all things, best calculated to keep an individual from praying as he ought.

7. The subject furnishes a test of character.—The Spirit maketh intercession for whom? For the saints. Those who are saints are thus exercised. If you are saints, you know by experience what it is to be thus exercised, or it is because you have grieved the Spirit of God, so that he will not lead you. You live in such a manner, that this Holy Comforter will not dwell with you, nor give you the spirit of prayer. If this is so, you must repent.—Whether you are a Christian or not, don't stop to settle that, but repent, as if you never had repented. Do your first works. Don't take it for granted that you are a Christian, but go like a humble sinner, and pour out your heart unto the Lord.—You never can have the Spirit of prayer in any other way.

8. The importance of understanding this subject.

(1.) In order to be useful. Without this spirit there can be no such sympathy between you and God, that you can either walk with God or work with God.—You need to have a strong beating of your heart with his, or you need not expect to be greatly useful.

(2.) As important as your sanctification. Without such a spirit you will not be sanctified, you will not understand the Bible, you will not know how to apply it to your case. I want you to feel the importance of having God with you all the time. If you live as you ought, he says he will come unto you, and make his abode with you, and sup with you, and you with him.

9. If people know not the spirit of prayer, they are very apt to be unbelieving in regard to the results of prayer. They don't see what takes place, or don't see the connection, or don't see the evidence.—They are not expecting spiritual blessings. When sinners are convicted, they think they are only frightened by such terrible preaching. And when people are converted, they feel no confidence, and only say, "We'll see how they turn out."